

Jewels Left in the Dung-hills: Broadside and other Vernacular Ballads Rejected by Francis Child

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Abstract: Although *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898) was the most systematic and scholarly collection of vernacular ballads published in the Victorian era, Francis Child nonetheless omitted from his canon a large number of extant narrative songs, including many found on black-letter broadsides and others that he had printed in his earlier collection, *English and Scottish Ballads* (1857-64). This article explores Child's changing approach to ballad editing, discusses his ambivalence towards broadsides, and examines his selective use of texts discovered by English collectors during the Late Victorian folksong revival, with a view to explaining what kinds of material he discarded and why he did so.

Francis Child's characterization of the Roxburghe and other collections of broadside ballads is well-known; he called them "veritable dung-hills, in which, only after a great deal of sickening grubbing, one finds a very moderate jewel" (Child 1872, in Hustvedt 1930: 254). Although his *magnum opus*, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898), was the most systematic and scholarly collection of traditional ballads yet published, he nonetheless omitted from his canon a large number of narrative songs, including many found on black-letter broadsides. There are two places where we can find vernacular ballads with which Child was certainly familiar but which he deliberately excluded from his second collection. They are his earlier ballad collection, and the various manuscript and printed sources from which he created the later collection.

Child's First Approach to Ballad Editing

Child was an American literary historian who taught English at Harvard College. He loved old ballads, and he was not afraid to think big. He began his work as a ballad editor in the 1850s, with the aim of remedying the lack of a comprehensive collection of traditional ballads that would bring together material from both Scottish and English sources. The initial result of this project was his first multi-volume publication, *English and Scottish Ballads* (1857-64), by far the largest edition of English-language narrative poems and songs then assembled.

In compiling *English and Scottish Ballads* Child used broadsides as one of his sources. From the sixteenth century onwards ballad texts had been published on broadsheets and in garlands and chapbooks. Indeed, most traditional ballads turn up first on broadsides. This is particularly true for English ballads, and for ballads for which we possess both English and Scottish texts. Except in a few cases where no broadside versions exist (for example, "Tam Lyn" and "Thomas Rymer"), most ballads come in two forms: an early form as a broadside, and a later form as a manuscript text written down from oral tradition.

Recognizing the chronological priority of most broadside sources does not in itself solve the issue of which came first: oral tradition or broadside. To this day, this remains an unsolved problem.¹ It is eminently possible that many broadside texts were created by their authors after hearing a traditional ballad sung in a tavern or at a country fair. Yet it remains equally possible that many ballads collected from oral tradition had in fact been learned initially from broadsides. In fact, broadsides may very well represent the single most important source of vernacular songs that subsequently became part of English oral tradition.

Although Child commented in the preface that his collection included doggerel "procured from very inferior sources" (1857-64: I: ix, note), one should not assume that all the broadsides that he reprinted warranted this criticism. In fact, he resurrected some beautiful and interesting texts that he would later spurn. He included no tunes, but, since ballads are integral wholes, both melody and text should be given whenever possible. As an example of one of the broadsides included in Child's early collection, here is "Walsingham" (1857-64: IV: 191-194):

As I Went to Walsingham

Anon
William Chappell

Folksong

As I went to Wal - sing - ham, to the shrine with
speed, Met I with a jol - ly pal - mer
in a pil - grim's weed.

As I went to Walsingham, to the shrine with speed,
Met I with a jolly palmer there, in a pilgrim's weed.

"As you came from the holy-land of Walsingham,
Met you not with my true love by the way as you came?"

"How should I know your true love, that have met many a
one,
As I came from the holy-land, that have come, that have
gone?"

"She ~~is~~ neither white nor brown, but as the heavens fair;
There ~~is~~ none hath a form so divine, on the earth, in the air."

¹ For a useful discussion of the issue, see Wehse 1974: 324-334.

"Such a one did I meet, good sir, with angel-like face,
Who like a queen did appear in her gait, in her grace."

"She hath left me here all alone, all alone and unknown,
Who sometimes lov'd me as her life, and call'd me her own."

"What's the cause she hath left thee alone, and a new way
doth take,
That sometime did love thee as her life, and her joy did thee
make?"

"I loved her all my youth, but now am old, as you see;
Love liketh not the fallen fruit, nor the withered tree.

For love is a careless child, and forgets promise past;
He is blind, he is deaf, when he list, and in faith never fast.

For love is a great delight, and yet a trustless joy;
He is won with a word of despair, and is lost with a toy.

Such is the love of womankind, or the word abus'd,
Under which many childish desire and conceits are excus'd.

But love is a durable fire, in the mind ever burning;
Never sick, never dead, never cold, from itself never turning."

This tune for "Walsingham" is taken from William Chappell's first collection of vernacular songs, *A Collection of National English Airs consisting of Ancient Song, Ballad and Dance Tunes* (1838: II: 100). Child was familiar with the song from his study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Ophelia sings a fragment), but he was aware of Chappell's first publication as well as his expanded edition, the magnificent *Popular Music of the Olden Timewhich* was published twenty years later.

Child's overall editorial approach in his early collection can only be described as eclectic. He included lengthy romances, such as "The Marriage of Sir Gawaine," "The Seven Champions of Christendom" and "The Knight of Curtesy, and the Fair Lady of Faguell." At the other end of the spectrum he slipped in a few other Elizabethan popular songs mentioned in Shakespeare's plays, including "Greensleeves." He also reprinted a considerable number of broadside ballads, such as "Jane Shore," "Queen Eleanor's Fall," "The West Country Damosel's Complaint," and "The Blind Beggar's Daughter of Bednall Green." He included "Walsingham" and another narrative song by Thomas Deloney, "The Spanish Lady's Love," as representative samples of late Tudor balladry by known ballad mongers.

English and Scottish Ballads was thus a rich but amorphous collection that comprised a variety of song types as well as some material that appeared unsingable. The net effect of the work was to broaden the notion of a traditional ballad to the point where it was difficult to see what all the specimens had in common.

Child's Change of Mind

Within a few years, Child began having second thoughts. Correctly suspecting that Percy, Scott, Pinkerton and other Romantic ballad editors had not been above doctoring their texts, he concluded that his great ballad collection was flawed because it reproduced their printed versions rather than the manuscript versions to which they had had access. He also decided that he had been too catholic when choosing what to include. A professional scholar working in a highly positivist intellectual climate, he now aspired to make literary history more scientific. What was needed, he decided, was a new collection based on primary sources that would include all extant versions of every genuinely traditional ballad.

Child then set out to locate and, where possible, purchase all the important extant ballad manuscripts, including both the Percy folio and the various collections made from Scottish oral tradition by Scott and his associates. In this difficult and ambitious venture he enlisted the help of various English and Scottish collaborators, but it was still a labour of Hercules that took several decades. Nearly twenty years later Child at last felt ready to bring out the first volume of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. It would take another sixteen years before the edition was complete.

The change of title was significant. Child was now convinced that genuinely traditional ballads were anonymous, and that they had a communal origin. To count as "popular" a ballad had to be either very old indeed or of unknown authorship. He consequently decided to exclude ballads that he believed had been composed (as opposed to merely reworked) by such known Elizabethan and Jacobean ballad-mongers as Deloney, Ravenscroft, Johnson, Parker, and Price. Indicative of his change of mind was his new attitude to the work of Thomas Deloney. In his earlier collection, he had included a variety of items from the publications usually ascribed to Deloney: *The Garland of Good Will*, *The Pleasant Historie of John Winchcombe* and *Wit Restord*. He now rejected them, along with all literary ballads by other authors that had been composed as poetry rather than as singing texts. This meant discarding such beautiful songs as 'Walsingham' and 'The Spanish Lady's Love,' not to mention 'The Faire Lady Rosamond,' 'Shore's Wife,' 'How Coventry Was Made Free,' 'The Duke of Cornwall's Daughter' and 'The Winning of Cales.' He retained only one ballad from Deloney, 'The Maiden's Song' (aka 'The Fair Flower of Northumberland'), presumably because he doubted Deloney's authorship of the *piece*.²

Child and the Broadside

Jettisoning songs by known Elizabethan and Jacobean ballad writers did not solve the question of how to handle broadsides as a genre. There were several thousand extant broadside texts, and they included hundreds of variants of ballads that appeared, at least at first glance, to be traditional in form, diction, or subject matter. Child was well aware of the readily available sources of such anonymous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century broadsides: the Rawlinson, Wood and Douce collections in the Bodleian Library, the Pepys collection in Magdalen College Library, Cambridge, and the

² Child # 9. He knowingly broke his rule of no compositions by known authors only once in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, **when**, for the sake of completeness, he included Martin Parker's "True Tale of Robin Hood" (Child # 154) as one of his thirty-six Robin Hood ballads.

Roxburghe and Bagford collections in the British Museum. But he was very selective in his use of broadside texts in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Those broadsides that he did choose to reprint usually complemented Scottish manuscript texts. For example, he had several different Scottish versions of "Queen Eleanor's Confession" but no English text other than a broadside, so he reprinted that broadside.³

Child's attitude towards black-letter broadsides - even anonymous ones - was ambivalent, even schizophrenic. He heartily disliked them, yet he soon realized that he could not avoid them entirely. So he devised a rule of thumb in dealing with them. If he concluded *on the basis of other evidence* that a ballad was traditional, then he would print any broadside variants that he had come across. But in almost all other instances he rejected broadside texts out of hand.⁴

As just one illustration of the broadside material Child spurned, we may take an anonymous narrative song of rural, lower-class origin. It typifies the ballad of "later tradition" that circulated on provincial broadsides, and its treatment of poaching, murder and revenge reveals much about class conflict in "Merrie England." There were several versions of "The Death of Bill Brown." Davison Ingledew reprinted one, titled "Bill Brown the Poacher," in *The Ballads and Songs of Yorkshire* (1860). John Ashton reprinted another in *Modern Street Ballads* (1888). This variant, which is similar to Ashton's, was included in Frank Kidson's *Traditional Tunes* (1891:131-132).⁵

³ Child # 156. The same was true for, among others, "The Broomfield Hill" (Child # 43), "The Famous Flower of Serving Men" (Child # 106), "The Daemon Lover" (Child # 243), "Sir Hugh the Grime" (Child # 191) and "Lord Bateman" (Child # 53).

⁴ Robin Hood ballads were, admittedly, an exception to this rule, since Child had no Scottish texts to legitimize them. When they were not to be found in the Percy folio manuscript, broadsides were often his only available source. Thirty-one of the thirty-six Robin Hood ballads derived from broadsides; nineteen of them were found only as broadsheets or reprinted in *Robin Hood's Garland*, and for eight more the only other source was the Percy folio manuscript, in which the Robin Hood material had probably been copied from broadsides in any case. Hence if Child had not broken his rule for Robin Hood ballads, he would have had to reject most of them, and he just could not bring himself to do so.

⁵ Kidson omitted the chorus line except in the first verse.

The Death of Bill Brown

Anon
Frank Kidson

Folksong

Ye gen - tle - men both great and small, game-

keep - ers, poach - ers, sports - men all, Come list - en to a

sim - ple clown, I'll sing you the death of poor Bill Brown, Come

list - en to a sim - ple clown, I'll sing you the death of Bill

Brown.

Ye gentlemen both great and small, gamekeepers, poachers, sportsmen all,
Come listen to a simple clown, I'll sing you the death of poor Bill Brown,
Come listen to a simple clown, I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

One stormy night, as you shall hear, it was in the season of the year,
We went to the woods to catch a fat buck, but, ah! that night we had bad luck -
Bill Brown was shot and his dog was stuck, and I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

When we got to the woods our sport begun, I saw the gamekeeper present his
gun,
I call'd on Bill to climb the gate to fetch the fat buck, but it was too late,
For there he met his untimely fate, and I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

Then dying he lay upon the ground, and in that state poor Bill I found,
And when he saw me he did cry, "Revenge my death!" "I will," said I,
"For many a hare have we caught hard by." And I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

I know the man that shot Bill Brown, I know him well and could tell the clown;
And to describe it in my song - blackjacket he had, and red waistcoat on:
I know him well, and they call him Tom; and I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

I dressed myself up next night in time, I got to the wood, and the clock struck

nine;
 The reason was, and I'll tell you why, to find the gamekeeper I'll go try,
 Who shot my friend, and he should die; and I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

I ranged the wood all over, and then I looked at my watch and it was just ten;
 I heard a footstep on the green, I laid myself down for fear of being seen,
 For I plainly saw that it was Tom Green; and I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

Then I took my piece fast in my hand, resolved to fire if Tom did stand;
 Tom hear the noise and turned him round, I fired and brought him to the ground -
 My hand gave him his deep death wound; and I'll sing you the death of Bill Brown.

Now revenge, you see, my hopes have crowned, I've shot the man that shot Bill Brown;
 Poor Bill no more these eyes will see - Farewell, dear friend, farewell to ye,
 For I've crowned his hopes and his memory, and I've sung you the death of Bill Brown

Space does not permit a long list of the vernacular ballads Child omitted from his canon. The cluster of broken token ballads ("The Dark-eyed Sailor" and variants) provides one obvious example, but there are many more. Broadside ballads about parental opposition to lovers are numerous, as are tales of faithful and unfaithful lovers. One could cite such songs of feminine daring as "The Banks of Sweet Dundee," or the many ballads that reflected aspects of rural life, such as "John Barleycorn." And why discriminate against such a beautiful allegory as "The Bonny Bunch of Roses," such a moving tale of lovers' parting as "High Germany," or such an interesting seafaring ballad as "The Greenland Fishery?" Child apparently recoiled from certain subjects, including alcohol, poaching, prostitution, whaling, and pressgangs. Nor was he fond of ballads about class conflict, or those with anti-military themes. Indeed, he seems not to have been interested in any ballads that reflected the social (or political) life of Georgian or Victorian England, perhaps because he regarded them as insufficiently ancient. This prejudice against modern subjects also accounts for the omission of ballads about warfare in colonial North America or during the Napoleonic era.⁶

Child and the Late Victorian Folksong Revival

Mention of Kidson brings us to the English folksong revival and Child's curious way of dealing with ballads collected from English oral tradition during the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. Evidence that he was familiar with the many and varied publications of Victorian collectors can be found in his bibliography (1882-1898: X: 397-404). In total, the late Victorian revival contributed about forty items to *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. One can easily miss these when consulting the work, since most were hidden in the small print of the "Corrections and Additions" sections. However, their inclusion suggests that Child made a concerted effort to keep up with newly published

⁶ Convenient ways of grouping broadside ballads by subject matter are provided by Logan (1869) and Ashton (1887, 1888, 1891), whose collections provide more examples of ballads rejected by Child. See also Laws (1957).

British ballad literature and to extract from it anything he thought ought to find a place in his collection.

Nonetheless, one cannot rely on Child as a comprehensive guide to the narrative songs noted in England during the Late Victorian revival. He left out several dozen texts that appear to fit his implicit criteria for inclusion in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. His antipathy to modernity and to certain touchy subjects explains the exclusion of some of these songs, but it does not account for all his omissions. He knew such ballads as "Just As the Tide Was Flowing," "The Trees They Do Grow High" and "The Shooting of his Dear" since they appeared in books printed before the publication of the first part of his fifth volume, yet he still rejected these fruits of the Late Victorian revival. He also excluded such religious ballads as "The Holy Well," "The Bitter Withy" and "Christ Made a Trance." One could perhaps argue that they are carols rather than ballads, but the same is true of "The Cherry Tree Carol" which he included.⁷ "Christ Made a Trance" is less well known than the others so it may serve as a third illustration of the gems that Child left in the dung-hill:

Christ Made a Trance

Anon
Charlotte Bume

Folksong



Christ made a trance one Sunday view, all with his own dear hands,
He made the sun clear, and the moon, like the water on dry land.

[All for the saving of our souls] Christ died upon the cross,
What shall we do for our Saviour like He has done for us?

He's the rose, the rose, and the gen-teel rose, the fyarn that grows so green,
And God give us grace in ever-i place [to pray for our youthful Queen].

Go you down,,go you down, to yonder little town, as far as the hol-i well,
And there you'll see sweet Jesus Christ with his body nailed to a tree.

"O my dear son, what hast thou done, [that thou'rt nailed to a tree?]"

⁷Child # 54.

"Dear mother, dear mother, take young John [and love him instead of me.]"

"For it's O my dear son, that never can be done, that I should lather John
So well as my own dear son Jesus that I bore from my own bodie."

"Christ Made a Trance" was collected from traveller children in Shropshire by Charlotte Burne (1883-1886: 567 & 655). Burne was one of two late Victorian collectors from whom Child derived the most texts, the other being the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould. He was equally selective in his use of ballad texts collected by Baring-Gould, reprinting only those songs for which he already had other variants. In consequence the Late Victorian revival added no new items to the canon, although Child did have the opportunity - and the available material - to expand it beyond the chosen 305.

By the early 1890s Child was elderly, plagued by illness, and had no opportunity to return to the U.K., factors that may have hindered his effort to be systematic and inclusive when editing the last volumes. It is therefore possible that he may have simply missed an item or two that he would otherwise have included. More important, though, was his determination not to relax his criteria for what counted as a traditional ballad. In the main, the vernacular songs omitted from *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* were consciously excluded because Child did not deem them traditional. That judgement embraced not only songs by known Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and hundreds of anonymous broadsides but also some of the finest vernacular poetry recovered from oral tradition by the Late Victorian song-collectors.

Conclusion

In practice, Child fairly systematically excluded four kinds of material from his second collection. The first category consisted of verse romances that he had printed in *English and Scottish Ballads* but later decided to discard. He excluded these on the grounds that they were not vernacular ballads: they were lengthy poems by members of the educated elite, not narrative songs created and sung by the common folk.

Examples of Child's second category of excluded material can also be found in his earlier collection: narrative songs composed by Elizabethan and Jacobean balladeers. He similarly omitted ballads written by Romantic poets during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His reason for discarding these items was that they were composed by known authors.

The third class of ballad excluded by Child was the broadside. Although he included a considerable number of broadside texts in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* he did so only when he was convinced that those texts were variants of authentic traditional ballads for which he had at least one alternative (manuscript) source. The result was the omission of hundreds of ballads whose popularity was attested by their frequent reprinting and by the way they passed into oral tradition.

The fourth excluded category was that of ballads collected from oral tradition but for which there were no manuscript sources. In the main this meant songs noted by

nineteenth century collectors, including many of the fruits of the Late Victorian revival. They were rejected as too modern.

Child's rejects were thus discarded deliberately. However, one is forced to recognize an element of arbitrariness in Child's decision-making that defies easy explanation. Ultimately he seems to have been relying on his own values, preferences and intuition rather than rational criteria. He believed firmly that there was a fundamental difference between a genuinely "popular" ballad and the hundreds of other ballads that collectors had found on broadsides or noted from oral tradition. He also believed that he could distinguish between the two, yet his approach was more intuitive than empirical. Nor was it consistent. In separating the sheep from the goats he relied in part on his own judgement concerning the literary value of ballad texts. Yet his perspective was not entirely aesthetic. It also derived from his social and political values, and, above all, it reflected his prejudice in favour of manuscript sources.

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